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New York 1976 - EoB FOREVER/ AN OLD CRITIC THINKS HE REMEMBERS

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Andrzej Wirth

Name dropping is snobbism.
But premiere memories
are noble self-deceiving illusions
born from the love of theater.

Take the number of people
who believe that they saw
the first night of DREIGROSCHENOPER or EoB,
It exceeds ten times
the capacity of Theater am Schiffbauerdamm.
and the capacity of the Metropolitan Opera House.

I can swear to be present
on an informal project showing
at the BHF before
The five hours July 1976 Avignon premiere,
which makes me a senior expert on EoB.
However, Thom Donovan, a new archivist at the BHF
can't find any trace of it.

I believe I remember obtaining a two dollar ticket
at the Metropolitan Opera's legendary first New York night,
and riding to it in a taxi driven by Philip Glass,
although I can't explain why I took a taxi
living in relative nearness
at East 73rd Street.

I am am also sure of seeing the 1988
premiere of Achim Freyer's version of EoB
at the Stuttgart Staatsoper,
and I can believe myself, because at that time
I was teaching near Frankfurt.

And in 1992 I visited
My painter friend Karl Oppermann in Barcelona,
just in time to see the revival of the piece
and before the big fire in the Opera House.

Twenty years are gone,
and I fantasize about being in Ann Arbor, Michigan,
(which I remember from the premiere of
an anti-Vietnam War play by The Living Theater)
where Bob just opened an EoB revival.

The reasons for these obsessive uncertainties
are, my dears, structural.

Brecht's GALILEO in the theater
requires an attention similar
to that of a university lecture,
whereas EoB carries you into a realm of daydreaming
prompted by sound and moving sets,
which is the reason why you can take
five hours of it without intermission
(except at your own discretion)
but who makes use of it?

As you see, my dears,
the length of a spectacle is a relative thing.
I was daydreaming with my girlfriend in 1973 at the BAM
during Bob's THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSEPH STALIN,
a twelve-hour opera,
and had to marry afterwards.
You never know what theater does to you,
but you never forget it,
especially if you have to pay alimony for twenty years.
Anyway, I have good credentials for having delusions about EoB.

The one thing which stays with one forever
is, my dears, the forward driving rhythm of Glass' music,
repetitive and unstoppable like the noise
of the iconic locomotive on the EoB set.
It is clear that the music was written for the pictorial story board,
and not for a libretto, which does not exist.

Everything which does not exist:
 A fable, a dialogue, character, the conflict and resolution, etc.
 gives the piece a liberating lightness
 and allows attention to fly “ubi vult“,
 there is no lecturing in this process
 and no calls for attention,
 just an invitation to daydream.

The light and the dance movement
 are the heroes,
 And EoB's Einstein is not a character,
 but a multifaceted image.

How to recall at once,
 thirty six years old dream,
 the pleasing duration,
 the sound prompting movement,
 the movement prompting sound,
 the progress of solfege syllables
 as directorial commands.

Well, I was there,
 I thought I was dreaming.
 There is no other work, my dears,
 in which dialectics of technical progress
 appear more suggestive
 as aporia of triumph and disaster of the century.

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Mots-clés: Wilson (Bob), Avignon, mémoire

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Andrzej Wirth est le fondateur de l'Institut d'Arts du Spectacle Appliqués à l'Université de Giessen qu'il a dirigé entre 1982 et 1992 et où il est actuellement Professeur émérite. Il a été résident au Watermill Center dirigé par Bob Wilson. Depuis 1966, il a enseigné dans les universités de Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Londres, New York et Berlin. En tant que critique de théâtre, il a entre autre écrit sur Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski et Robert Wilson.